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AUTHOR Diana, Mark S.
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ABSTRACT

This paper illuminates how concepts of rationality developed by Diesing in 1962 are reflected in parents' childrearing decisions. After examining technical (TR), economic (ER), social (SR), legal (LR), and political (PR) rationalities or decision-making styles, consideration is given to integrative effects and the influence of parents' friends and relatives upon childrearing decisions. TR is construed in terms of the parenting goals of efficiency, maximization, and achievement; ER in terms of scarcity of time, energy, and resources, and the maximization of utility; SR in terms of confirming, supporting, and reinforcing behaviors leading to consistency and integration of roles; LR in terms of family rules and behavioral norms; and PR in terms of negotiation, discourse or bargaining. The childrearing decisions examined are based on observations of the home environment of a two-parent family with an 11-month-old daughter. Discussion focuses on how each type of rationality is involved on an unconscious or conscious level as parents make choices about those experiences of their child which involve a significant amount of adult attention, response and direction. (RH)

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Rationality and Integration in a Family Childrearing Decision

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Mark S. Diana, Ph.D.
Department of Home Economics,
Family Life and Consumer Education
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859

As a process, childrearing involves multiple decisions occurring on both unconscious and conscious levels. Decisions affecting the child may take place within the family unit or may occur in other environments with which the child or family have contact. Multiple factors specific to each decision-making situation effect the making of childrearing decisions. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the process of decision-making related to childrearing by considering how technical, economic, social, legal and political rationalities are used by parents in making unconscious and conscious decisions effecting their children.

Unconscious childrearing decisions are based on perceptions, values and reactions which have already been developed by the parent. These decisions or responses by parents are routine. Situations involving unconscious decisions include those to which parents react or respond as a result of psychological characteristics of themselves or of their child. Unconscious decisions happen because there is an established pattern of interaction developed between parent and child. Parents and children make conscious decisions based upon a pattern of learned responses to situations.

Conscious childrearing decisions involve new variables. In conscious childrearing decisions there is interaction between mother and father, between parents and children, or between parents and those individuals or groups comprising the social network in which parents and children participate. (Bott 1957) It is through this process of mutual interaction within the family unit, between the family and its

external environment that individual and family decisions are made. Rules are reinforced, ways of problem solving, bargaining, and persuading are developed, changed or refined, and perceptions with respect to efficiency and maximization in goal attainment are altered and reinforced. (Diesing 1962) This interactional process, both conscious and unconscious, moves toward an integration of values within the family's social network providing opportunities to confirm, support and reinforce those roles and relationships which family members assume.

Basic to both unconscious and conscious decision-making are the concepts of rationality developed by Diesing in his work Reason in Society. Diesing has identified five types of rationality as characteristic of decision-making in families and in society. These rationalities or decision-making styles include technical, economic, social, legal and political. (Diesing 1962) Family decisioning may be based on one of these rationalities, contain elements of several rationalities or include aspects from all five types of rationality. Within the family unit particular decisions are made using the rationalities defined by Diesing. As childrearing decisions are made families try to achieve a rational integration of these decisions with their family goals. That integration begins with an attempt to achieve compromise and to coordinate the divergent interests, values and goals of family members. On another level, the family unit trys to achieve rational integration of family goals and childrearing decisions with the rationalities used in making childrearing decisions that are supported by the family's social network of relatives and friends.

In an effort to understand how Diesing's concepts of rationality are reflected in childrearing decisions, this paper will examine a particular childrearing decision which has been made on a conscious level by parents. In examining each of the five rationalities, consideration will be given to the impact of the family's social network upon childrearing decisions. An emphasis upon social network is appropriate since family units and parents choose among alternatives and make decisions affecting their child within an environment that, for most families, involves input from relatives, friends and social groups.

The childrearing decisions examined in this paper are based on observations regarding the home environment of a two parent family with an eleven month old daughter. The childrearing decision considers how each type of rationality is involved on an unconscious or conscious level as parents make choices about their child's experiences. These experiences involve a significant amount of adult attention, response and direction. While the description of behaviors and activities are based on observation, some of the rationalities discussed in this paper are inferred as the result of parental input regarding other family issues discussed by the parents with the researcher. By using observation from a family setting Diesing's theoretical model of decision-making can be placed within a practical perspective. Glaser and Strause refer to the use of a theory or model in looking at practical situations as an effort to ground theory in reality. (Glaser and Strause 1967)

Diesing considers technical rationality basic to most decision-making situations. (Diesing 1962) Technical rationality includes the concepts of efficiency, maximization, and achievement as goals in the decision-making process. Thus, task performance which includes efficiency and achievement as basic components is critical in making technical decisions. Interviews with the parents in this study as well as observations of parents with their daughter suggest that technical rationality was significant in parental organization of the child's environment. The mother expressed the belief that, if she knew how, she is certain it would be possible to teach her child to talk and to read at eleven months. (Diana, 1982) In her attempt to meet this goal the mother used a prepared program with her daughter. The mother's behavior is clearly based upon technical rationality. She is interested in her child's achievement and is focusing upon maximization and efficiency. The father also expressed his interest in maximizing his daughter's achievement. He enjoys teaching, showing things to his daughter and talking to her about her environment. He says he participates in these activities to enrich his child's language development. Both parents believe that their daughter's development will be more rapid if they provide an environment with many opportunities to explore and experience the world. Interaction between parents, ie. the family's internal social network supports and reinforces a technical rationality involving maximization of their daughter's achievement. There is a sense of integration with respect to technical goals which is achieved through

reciprocal relationships between parents. Bronfenbrenner has identified these reciprocal relationships as significant factors in the child's development. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

There is also support for technical childrearing goals from the family's external social network of relatives and friends. The father identifies education and achievement as significant suggesting that the family's external social network contributes to making child-rearing decisions. Mother and father are also influenced by friends who are part of their external social network. Both parents comment that they share the interests and values of parents who provide a rich environment which maximizes the child's opportunity for growth. Parents include in this perception the concept of utility with respect to activities and experiences provided for the child. Thus, technical goals of achievement, maximization, efficiency and utility are supported by the family's social network.

A second rationality identified by Diesing is economic. Economic rationality emphasizes scarcity with respect to concepts of time, energy and resources. In interviews both parents express concern that time is now limited for themselves and see time and their own energy as scarce resources. (Diana, 1982) This perception of scarcity is consistent with Diesing's description of economic rationality. The decision of these parents to provide varied experiences for their child allows for exploration and provides the child with multiple opportunities for using resources.

Another concept developed by Diesing in looking at economic rationality is that of utility. From this perspective, parental decisioning is based

upon "...which end promises the greatest return from a given expenditure." (Diesing, 1962, p. 49) As in technical decision-making, maximization is still the goal. According to the parents in this study, the greatest utility to be gained in their child's development is through parental efforts to share their own skills and competencies as users of language and as interpretors of the environment. Utility of resources and maximization of the child's developmental opportunities occur through parental choice of activities and experiences appropriate for the child.

The concepts of scarcity, utility and maximization in parental decision-making are shared by the family's social network of relatives and friends. Thus, a network of support exists for parental childrearing decisions involving economic rationality. Mother and father in this study share perspectives with respect to scarcity, utility and maximization with the family's external social network providing support for childrearing decisions based upon an economic rationality.

Integration of values and interaction across social networks logically lead to the consideration of Diesing's third rationality: social decision-making. Diesing identifies the concepts of confirming, supporting and reinforcing as critical in social rationality. He believes that these interactions result in consistency and integration of roles. (Diesing, 1962) Aspects of social rationality are evident in the observed behaviors and attitudes of the mother and father as they make childrearing decisions. As mother and father interact with each other there is a sense of confirmation, support and reinforcement. Each parent enjoys taking an educative role with their child. McGillicuddy-DeLisi identifies

this process as one of mutual influence upon individual parent beliefs which "...play a critical mediating role between the structure of the family and the influence of family members on one another." (McGuillicuddy-DeLisi, 1980) These roles include a process or value dimension which has as much significance for the parents as technical and economic goals do. The mother emphasizes that holding her child and the process of showing and teaching is as important in her child's development as what her daughter learns. The father indicates that he places a high value on expressive and emotional development of his child. The father's emphasis is on process and roles. He identifies this an an aspect of development which was missing in his own childrearing, the father emphasizes that his daughter's feelings, her happiness and her joy as an explorer of her environment are more significant to him than what she learns. For both parents a strong emphasis is placed upon process and integration in making their childrearing decisions. (Diana, 1982)

Integration exists between parents so that there is consistency in the family's internal social network with regard to social rationality. Interesting, too, is the way parents have selected individuals and families outside the father's family of orientation as an external social network from whom they can gain reinforcement for childrearing decisions based upon social rationality. It appears that this mother and father seek support for childrearing decisions through selective use of a social network which reinforces those rationalities and upon which both parents agree. In this way, the family achieves integration regarding social decision-making by selecting an external social network which will support the childrearing decisions they wish to make.

Legal rationality, as Diesing views it, is somewhat more difficult to conceptualize as part of this family's childrearing decisions. In society, there is a legal expectation that parents provide a suitable environment which will not be detrimental to a child's welfare. While competent parents are aware of this legal base, they do not make childrearing decisions as a result of any conscious thought, nor would the family's external social network be likely to give any consideration to this type of legal rationality. However, when legal rationality is viewed on another level as family rules, then the choices provided a child and the behaviors engaged in by parents could be considered representative of consciously thoughtout behavioral norms or rules. For safety reasons, both parents provide similar limitations with respect to the spaces their child can explore. This rationality can be thought of as legal in the sense that rules are set by the parents which appear to be well integrated with respect to the family's internal social network. It also seems, from what the parents have said that the family's external social network of friends and relatives would be supportive of these decisions. In this way, the family experiences a sense of integration with respect to the rational base for childrearing decisions which support the decision-making process. Parental behaviors, such as amount of support and control provided a child, can also be thought of as having a legal rationality in terms of the behavior norms represented to the child. Both parents show a high degree of positive support for their child and tend to control behavior through the use of redirection, through environmental arrangement, and through positive intervention at times when they become concerned about their child's safety. These parents have

achieved shared levels of support and control creating an integrated social network. This sense of integration is further strengthened through regular contact with relatives and friends who share common feelings regarding support and control behaviors providing the family with an external social network which leads to a feeling of integration regarding legal childrearing decisions.

Diesing identifies the political as the fifth type of rationality which influences decisioning. He views political rationality as discourse or bargaining and sees it as a negotiation process. (Diesing 1962) In terms of childrearing decisions, there are several ways in which bargaining or discourse occurs in the family and affects decision-making. For example, both parents frequently participate in discussions concerning what their child will do, how it will be done and where it will occur. While these issues may involve technical, economic, social or legal issues the process of discourse has a political rational base. Moreover, since interaction between parent and child is mutual that interactional process can be viewed as political. There is give and take, or a sense of bargaining between the parents and their child over childrearing decisions involving developmental experiences and organization of the environment. Consistent with this focus upon the child's role in political decision-making is Carter and Welch's article which identifies the child's behavior as a variable affecting parenting style. (Carter and Welch 1981) Political rationality, or discourse leads to the parent making choices concerning the child's environment and experiences, and is integrated at the level of the

family's internal social network. Moreover, interaction or discourse between parents and their friends and extended kin help to develop a shared rationality which leads to a sense of integration with respect to the child's experiences and environment.

The decisions about a child's environment and experiences considered in this paper clearly indicate the complex nature of the decision-making process. Recognizable is the way in which childrearing decisions draw upon each rationality developed by Diesing. As a result, rationalities become integrated with regard to the family's decision process taking on a political and social base where bargaining is crucial to a rational decisioning process and integration of decisions is achieved as a result of the bargaining. Also significant is the tendency for a family's internal social network and external social network to lead toward integration with the family unit and its environment. This integration occurs at both unconscious and conscious levels just as decisioning does. Moreover, the sense of integration which is developed varies depending on the issues, upon the type of rationality and upon the childrearing decision. Here parents are selective in developing discourse and seeking integration with those groups or individuals who are most likely to support the rationalities they use as a base for any childrearing decision.

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